



Successful Proposal Preparation

Writing a Winning Proposal: Tips, Traps and Techniques

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Purpose



Participants: Compete in the Federal Marketplace

- ▼ Learn your role (prime, subcontractor, protégé or team member)
- ▼ Win more jobs
- ▼ Perform them well and profitably

Agencies/Primes: Develop additional sources

- ▼ -Conduct business with outstanding contractors
- Implement Small Business (SB), Small-disadvantaged business (SDB), Women-owned business (WOB) and other initiatives

Objectives

- Provide basics of Source Selection Process
 - “Best-Value” process (“Competitive-evaluated”)
- Get the "Big Picture"--Ask the right questions
- Learn about **Areas of Emphasis**
 - Grading Proposals
 - Making the Competitive Range
 - Performing well during Oral Discussions
 - Recent changes to the process



Workshop Outline

- Pre-RFP Activities
- Proposal Preparation Period
- Initial Evaluation/Scoring of Proposals
- Oral Discussions
- Final Proposal Revisions
- Final Evaluation
- Case Study: Traveling Wave Tube Amplifier



Pre-RFP Agency/ Prime Contractor Activities

Acquisition Strategy Issues

- ▼ **Goal:** Meet *minimum* agency/prime need, on time, at a reasonable cost
- ▼ **Steps Required:**
 - Identify *Mission Need*
 - Learn about *Make-Buy* decision
 - Learn about Govt. *Marketing Research* for effort
 - Develop *SOW, Specs, Standards*
 - Develop *Evaluation Criteria*
 - Develop *Request for Proposal* (RFP)
 - Apply criteria to proposals to make source selection

Obstacles

▼ Large/R&D Contracts Commonly Impacted by:

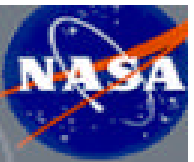
- Funding Constraints
- Changes in Program Requirements
- Advances in Technology
- Unrealistic Estimates
- Defective or Ambiguous Specs

▼ Challenges

- Govt./Prime** - Get the job done right
- Proposer**- Win the job and earn a profit



The Players



■ Source Selection Team

- ▼ Contracting Officer
- ▼ Cognizant Technical Official
- ▼ Team Members
- ▼ Program Manager

■ Outside Influences

- ▼ Rulemakers - Agencies and Congress: Using Regulations and Laws (e.g., CICA)
- ▼ Arbiters - GAO, Courts and Boards: Handling Protests of Awards



Agency/Prime Contractor First Steps

Agency Must:

- ▼ Decide *what* to buy
- ▼ Find *sources*
- ▼ Use *acquisition planning* and *market surveys* (**FAR 7.102**)

Defining the Job

- ▼ Goal = Describe desired performance/functional requirements in RFP
- ▼ Methods = Drawings, technical documents, specs, standards, etc
- ▼ Constraints: **FAR 11.002** = Commercial or nondevelopmental items preferred
- ▼ Unduly restrictive specifications prohibited



Agency/Prime Contractor First Steps (cont.)



Market Research

- ▼ Understand the marketplace to maximize competition
- ▼ Look at Govt. databases, use Requests for Information
- ▼ If we ask for information, respond fully and promptly

Compile Source List

- ▼ Use Commerce Business Daily (CBD) for jobs > \$25,000
- ▼ Use office's bidders lists
- ▼ Advertise to trade associations, in the media, etc.
- ▼ Determine whether the job can be a set-aside



Government's Source Selection Plan

Contents

- ▼ Part I - Organization, membership and team responsibilities
- ▼ Part II - Evaluation criteria and procedures for evaluating proposals

Source Evaluation Team

- ▼ Contracting Officer (C.O.) - Handles solicitations and negotiations; may also be the Source Selection Official (SSO)
- ▼ Cognizant technical official - covers technical requirements
- ▼ C.O. may form committees
 - ▼ Technical, management, cost
 - ▼ Consultants (legal, financial, QA, RA, etc.)



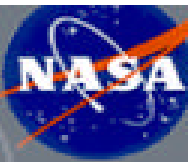
Government's Source Selection Plan

(cont.)



Who Are These People?

- ▼ Qualified, experienced functional experts
- ▼ Balance of program expertise vs. independence
- ▼ No conflict of interest
- ▼ Very busy and not completely familiar with the effort
- ▼ Analyze your likely evaluators
 - Cover all areas of their interest
 - Don't assume they know the job, the merits of your approach, or your company's strengths
 - Make it easy for them to locate data in your proposal



Types of Evaluation Factors

Technical

Management

Cost or Price

Other Factors

- ▼ Financial Capability
- ▼ Past Performance



Developing Evaluation Factors

■ Purpose of Factors

- ▼ Assess ability to meet contract requirements
- ▼ Determine relative merits of competing proposers

■ Strategy for Developing Factors

- ▼ **FAR 15.605** guidance
 - Tailor factors for each acquisition
 - Include only those that will impact source selection
 - Price (or cost) and quality are always factors
 - *Note:* Agencies have great discretion in formulating factors and weightings



Developing Evaluation Factors (cont.)

Why Important?

- ▼ Every RFP is different (Don't assume factors will be the same as last time)
- ▼ Excel in the *listed* factors
- ▼ You *must* have
 - ▼ Best Cost/price
 - OR-
 - ▼ Best value with a reasonable price
- ▼ Proposal must show you meet contract requirements
 - AND-
 - represent the best buy against the RFP's priorities

Developing the Rating System

■ Relative Weights

- ▼ Agency determines relative importance of factors and method
 - Fixed weights (e.g., 400 points for design, 350 points for management, 250 points for fab. and test)
 - Variable weights (e.g., "If technical proposals are relatively equal, cost becomes more important")
 - Priority or tradeoff analysis (e.g., decide if technical and management differences between proposers warrant price differential)
 - Go/No-Go (e.g., "If the product does not pass life test, the entire proposal is unacceptable")
 - Indeterminate weights (e.g., "The factors are listed in descending order of importance")

NOTE: Cost/price is frequently not weighted

Why Important:

- ▼ Gear your emphasis to the heavily weighted items
- ▼ Determine which cost/price strategy is being used
- ▼ Put yourself in the position of the SSO- would you pick your company, given the tradeoff specified in the RFP?
- ▼ If you can't meet the go-no criteria, NO BID
- ▼ If you aren't competitive, vis-a-vis the factors (and other proposers, NO BID



Scoring System

Methods

- ▼ Colors, Numerical, ranking, adjectival

Why Scoring is Important to you

- ▼ Agency can't select you if unacceptable in any significant area
 - ▼ Too expensive
 - ▼ Critical weakness
- ▼ If you don't score high enough, you may be eliminated from the competitive range
 - Don't assume you can get well later



Proposal Preparation Period Initial Steps



Read and Analyze the RFP (NASA Center example)

▼ Section C - Description/specs/SOW

- Identify minimum, mandatory requirements (If you don't meet, you're non-responsive)
- Identify requirements that are difficult to satisfy or where competitors are ahead of you
- Identify areas which offer you a competitive advantage
- Identify any requirements that unduly restrict competition

▼ Section D - Deliveries or performance

- Verify you can meet schedule

▼ Section H - Special contract requirements

- Ensure you meet these



Proposal Preparation Period

Initial Steps (cont.)



- ▼ Section H- Special Contract Requirements (cont.)
 - Ensure you include their impact in your cost/price proposal
- ▼ Section J - List of attachments
 - Often contain the real technical requirements
- ▼ Section L - Instructions, conditions, notices to offerors
 - Compare the proposal instructions to the evaluation factors
(The combination equals the rules of the competition)
 - Determine if you can submit an alternate proposal
- ▼ Section M - Evaluation factors for award
 - Understand factors, subfactors, and relative importance
 - Determine relative importance of technical/management vs. cost/price
 - Understand the overall basis for contract award



Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps (cont.)



Decide whether to bid

- ▼ Can you successfully perform the job?
- ▼ Consider benefit vs. business risk
- ▼ Assess your potential competition

Consult legal counsel immediately if proposal is unduly restrictive

- ▼ Must file protests before due date

Establish a Proposal Team

- ▼ Appoint someone as focal point
- ▼ Use functional specialists for eval. factors/compliance areas



Proposal Preparation Period- Initial Steps (cont.)



Establish a Proposal Schedule

- ▼ Allow time for the following:
 - Graphics, printing, reproduction, shipment
 - Revision of cost/price proposal to reflect technical/management changes
 - Obtain vendor/subcontractor quotes and proposals
 - Management/legal review

Follow-up Steps

- Improve your chances for winning the job
 - ▼ Obtain technical documents to enhance your understanding of the job
 - ▼ Use agency "libraries" set up for proposers
 - ▼ Read all on-line reference documents
 - ▼ Find out what has and has not worked in the past

- Generate a Compliance Matrix
 - ▼ List every requirement of the SOW and specs
 - ▼ Do you meet, exceed, or fail to meet each one?
 - If you don't meet, find a way to comply - or no-bid
 - If you exceed, determine whether cost of exceeding is worth it

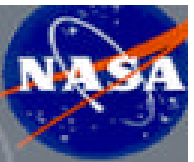
Follow up steps (cont.)

Determine Your Proposal Strategy

- ▼ Identify customer's critical requirements-brainstorm possible cost-effective solutions
- ▼ Create a proposal theme (why you should be selected)
 - "Leading experts in the country"
 - "Highest reliability"
 - "Low life cycle cost"
 - "Innovative approach solves the hazardous material problem"
- ▼ Determine your pricing strategy (target cost)
 - CAREFULLY REVIEW THE PROPOSAL INSTRUCTIONS



Interface with the Customer



Pre-proposal Conferences

- ▼ Purpose -- To provide additional information which proposers may need
- ▼ Content may include:
 - Question and Answer sessions
 - Job walk
 - Observation of on-going operations
 - Overview of the project, from the customer's perspective
- ▼ It's essential that you attend!
- ▼ **Note:** The RFP takes precedence over anything presented at conference - (unless agency subsequently modifies RFP)



Interface with the Customer

(cont.)



Addenda to the RFP

- ▼ Government can amend the RFP, or answer questions, by issuing addenda
- ▼ You must comply
- ▼ Acknowledge receipt of each addendum on the appropriate form (or you may be nonresponsive)
- ▼ Call the C.O./negotiator to verify whether addenda were issued which you may not have received

Asking Questions

- ▼ C.O. will receive questions from proposers
- ▼ If warranted, answer will be provided to all sources as an addendum



Interface with the Customer

(cont.)

Asking Questions (cont.)

- ▼ If unsure of a requirement, send in a question
- ▼ Holding back can only hurt you
 - You may guess wrong
 - C.O. generally can't answer after proposals received
 - Unasked questions on defective specs may render you responsible during contract performance
 - Unasked questions on restrictive specs may cause you to lose a bid protest
- ▼ Don't ask questions of anyone besides the C.O./negotiator
 - Answers aren't binding; only the RFP is
 - Answers may lead you down the wrong path



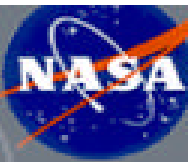
Preparing the Proposal

What is a proposal?

- ▼ A legal offer - If accepted, you are legally bound to perform
- ▼ A sales document - Demonstrates you meet the requirements and have the best solution to the RFP

Format the Proposal to Match the Proposal Instructions

- ▼ Include a Table of Contents
- ▼ Put material in the volume/section specified (We can't evaluate what we can't find)
- ▼ Comply with any page limitation
- ▼ Compliance matrices should cross-reference the WBS, paragraphs in the specification, etc.



Preparing the Proposal (cont.)

Format the Proposal to match the Proposal Instructions (cont.)

- ▼ Execute all required representations and certifications (or you may be nonresponsive)
- ▼ Consider an executive summary
- ▼ Respond to every instruction and every requirement

Minimize Exceptions

Be Consistent (Technical/Management/Cost)

Be Credible - Support Your Positions

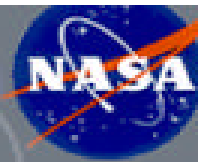
Use a "Red Team" to review the proposal

Submit Your Best Proposal Now - Don't wait until Discussions



How to Lose (Partial List)

- Fail to Understand What the Customer Wants
- Misinterpret the Requirements
- Take Exception or Otherwise Fail to Comply with the Requirements
- Fail to Provide all Requested Information
- Fail to Substantiate Your Statements
- Put Data Where Evaluators Can't Find It
- Unrealistic Schedules, Pricing, or Technological Advances
- Deliver Proposal Late



Proposal Evaluation

How the Evaluators Do Their Job

- ▼ Review RFP requirements
- ▼ Analyze company's approach vs. requirements
- ▼ Generate strengths, weaknesses and questions against each factor
- ▼ Consensus, as appropriate
- ▼ Apply rating system to the data
- ▼ Conduct Cost/Price Evaluation
 - Cost-reimbursement -evaluate realism of proposed cost (agency will generate "probable cost" after discussions)
- ▼ Generate cost questions for discussions



Award on Initial Proposals

Submit a proposal that's competitive, yet is one with which you can live

Read your RFP: Agency can't award without discussions unless RFP so permits.

Trend is towards making award without discussions if acceptance "as is" represents the lowest overall cost to the agency and is technically acceptable

Rarely done for cost contracts (discussions required)



Competitive Range Determination

- Unless award is made on initial proposals, Government must conduct discussions with all proposers who are found to be in the "competitive range" (CR)
- CR = Those proposers who have a reasonable chance of receiving the award
 - ▼ Not a predetermined number or score
 - ▼ Not those who are "acceptable" or higher
- If you don't make the CR, you've lost
- Decision depends on all the facts - cost/price and RFP factors



Competitive Range Determination

(cont.)

Old Rule: If there is any doubt, include in CR

New Rule: Smaller CRs (NASA-desires three max)

If proposer doesn't meet a mandatory requirement (and isn't expected to after discussions) drop from CR

Your proposal as submitted must be your best

- Otherwise, you may be out of the competition

Why Conduct Discussions?

- ▼ Verify/revise strengths and weaknesses
- ▼ Penetrate basis of estimate for proposed cost/price
- ▼ Assess proposed personnel face-to-face
- ▼ Verify adequacy of facilities and equipment
- ▼ Government only - allow opportunity to cure deficiencies
- ▼ Addresses questions that may impact source selection

Methods

- ▼ Written discussions
 - Respond to written questions by deadline
 - Provides opportunity to submit proposal revisions for more complex issues

Discussions (cont.)

Methods (cont.)

- ▼ Oral discussions
 - Respond to advance written questions
 - Respond to "real-time" oral questions
 - Observe facilities, equipment - if desired
 - Witness product test - if set forth in RFP
 - Assess personnel (by directing questions or splinter interviews)
- ▼ Negotiations may even be conducted



Proposer “Do’s” and “Don’ts”

Be Prepared

- ▼ After submitting proposal, look for areas of improvement
- ▼ Prepare written answers to advance questions
- ▼ Know your proposal thoroughly

Conduct Yourself Professionally

- ▼ Don't run down competitors
- ▼ Answer questions without hyperbole

Know the Ground Rules

- ▼ Agenda
- ▼ Time available for responses
- ▼ Methodology



Proposer “Do’s” and “Don’ts”



Answer the Questions - Don't Conduct a Design Review

Explain Planned Changes

Track and Complete Action Items

Decode Why a Question is Being Asked

Examples: Questions for Discussions

- ▼ "Your proposal is deficient in that you didn't describe who performs system engineering." (Leading)
- ▼ "Provide a demonstration of your automated tool for requirements tracking."
- ▼ "Describe for us how performance requirements are handled."
- ▼ "Provide your rationale for not providing electric field analyses"
- ▼ "Discuss in detail the technical, schedule and cost impacts of implementing a breadboard to validate the intended design changes in the HVPS"



Proposer “Do’s” and “Don’ts”(cont.)

- ▼ Why don't you put an engineer in residence at subcontractor D?
(Not allowed)
- ▼ "Please explain the cost and schedule overrun problems you experienced on program X."
- ▼ Discuss your company's benefits package
- ▼ Discuss your company's cost accounting system
- ▼ Discuss your travel policy and process to receive airline tickets and travel advances
- ▼ Discuss your proposed bonus plan
- ▼ Discuss your timekeeping practices
- ▼ Provide a detailed breakdown of your overhead and G&A pools to include: vacations, sick leave, holidays and how they relate to the pools



Final Evaluations Process

Review/Revise Initial Strengths and Weaknesses

Determine which Deficiencies, if Any, Remain

Present Proposed Price or Probable Cost

NEW: Request updated written proposals with
contract executed by the proposers
(binding offers)

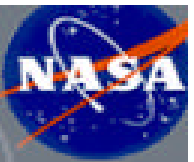
Provide Final Assessment to Source Selection
Official



Final Evaluations Process

Get a Debriefing

If the Agency violated the Source Selection Rules, consider filing a Protest



Case Study-TWTA Hardware Buy

- Design, fabricate, assemble, test, provide documentation and deliver one Engineering/Qualification Model and three Flight X-Band Traveling Wave Tube Amplifiers (TWTAs) <http://www.twtas.com/abouttwt.htm>
- TWTA consists of a TWT and a high Voltage Power Supply
- 100W, 8.4 GHz
- Long-lead, JPL GFP to Lockheed Martin
- Options for two additional TWTAs
- Fixed-Price Type Contract



Technical Criteria and Factors



Criterion T-1-Technical Approach (400 maximum pts.)

-The degree to which the proposer's technical approach will produce X-band TWTAs that will operate satisfactorily in the specified environments, meeting the applicable specifications and functional requirements of the Specimen Contract.

- Factor 1: TWT A overall design

- Factor 2: TWT Design and Development Methodology

- Factor 3: High Voltage Power Supply (HPVS) Design and Development Methodology



Technical Criteria and Factors

Criterion T-2: Integration and Testing Approaches (150 Maximum Points)

- The degree to which the proposer's integration and test approaches are appropriate for this TWTA effort.

Management Criteria

Criterion M-1: Resources (350 Maximum Points)

-The degree to which the proposer possesses the management skills and key personnel necessary to successfully conduct this effort.

Factor 1: Management Approach

Factor 2: Capability and Availability
of Key Personnel



Management Criteria

Criterion M-2: Related Experience (100 Maximum Points)

- The degree to which the proposer's related experience is directly applicable and will contribute towards the performance of the effort



RFP Proposal Instructions

Section T-1: Technical Approach (3 Factors follow)

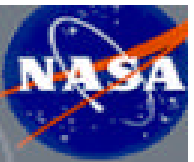
-Factor 1. TWTA Overall Design

Provide a detailed discussion of your proposed TWTA design, highlighting specifically how your design will meet the requirements in Exhibit 1 entitled “Component Specification for X-Band TWTA for Mars 2005

Reconnaissance Orbiter.” Provide a matrix that details compliance and non-compliance with the requirements in Exhibit 1.



RFP Proposal Instructions



Section T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

-Factor 1. TWTA Overall Design (cont.)

Exceptions to the requirements should be addressed by discussing the technical, cost and schedule impacts of noncompliance.

Describe the means of allocating requirements to the TWT and HVPS. Describe your approach for ensuring coordination and compatibility of the TWT and HVPS design efforts.



RFP Proposal Instructions

Section T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

-Factor 2. TWT Design and Development Methodology

Provide a detailed discussion of your proposed TWT design, specifically addressing how the design meets the TWT requirements in Exhibit 1. Include a detailed illustration or block diagram that clearly explains the overall design concept and architecture of the TWT. Address such design issues as trade-off decisions, life expectancy, RF stability and power.



RFP Proposal Instructions

Section T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

-Factor 3. HVPS Design and Development Methodology

- Provide a detailed discussion of your proposed HVPS design, specifically addressing how Exhibit 1 requirements will be met. Include a detailed block diagram that clearly explains the overall design concept and architecture. Provide a narrative discussion of the design.

RFP Proposal Instructions

Section T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

-Factor 3. HVPS Design and Development Methodology (cont.)

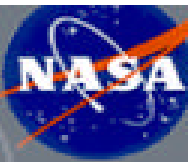
- This should include stability for all load conditions, encapsulation of high voltage modules and ability of transformers and capacitors to meet performance requirements over life and specified environment.



Proposer's Responses

Criterion T-1: Technical Approach

- Generally, a good response:
 - Will have a complete compliance matrix
Shows you comply, partially comply, don't comply and states how you intend to comply
 - Will assess impacts on technical, schedule and cost
 - Will rank risk and do trade-offs
 - Will provide facts that prove you can do it



Proposer's Responses

Criterion T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

- Strengths

- Very detailed description of the TWT
- Only minor frequency change required
- Excellent thermal models for the TWT
- Provided specimen test data on a production tube
- HVPS has design and flight heritage from "Project A and B"
- HVPS spec is mature, written, and included



Proposer's Responses

Criterion T-1: Technical Approach (cont.)

- Weaknesses:
 - No plan to do a breadboard
 - Uncertain tolerance to vibration environment
 - Radiation requirements not met by the HVPS
 - Did not propose required modifications to existing HVPS to meet MRO requirements
 - Disconnect between operating voltage and under voltage trip. However, proposal states compliance
 - No discussion of mass and size allocations



RFP Proposal Instructions

Section T-2: Integration and Testing Approaches

-Describe your approach (including a test matrix indicating all tests planned for the EQM and FM, schedules, and test flows) to integrating and testing the HVPS and TWT assemblies. Discuss planned tests at the TWT level and show how they meet Contract requirements. Discuss how you plan to use the EQM to validate FM build and test documentation. Describe your approach for minimizing risk to hardware and personnel, especially regarding subcontractor's roles.



Proposer's Responses

Criterion T-2: Integration/Testing Approaches

- Strengths

- Integration and testing approaches based on Project "M", which closely parallels MRO requirements
- Complete and thorough integration and testing matrices
- Complete and detailed process flow instructions and test flow program
- Extensive test equipment and facility capabilities

Proposer's Responses

Criterion T-2: Integration/Testing Approaches

- Weaknesses

- PCB flowchart shows the proposer's intent to "tin and then bend"
- No technical risk mitigation discussion
- Random vibration testing is proposed at the TWT and HVPS level but not at the integrated TWTA level
- Inconsistency between spec and compliance matrix whether TWT will be vibrated with RF on



RFP Proposal Instructions



Section M-1: Resources

-Factor 1. Management Approach

Describe your intended management plan

- Project organization and functional roles
- Detailed Work Breakdown Structure (WBS)
- Detailed project schedule identifying project reserve and critical path
- Subcontractors and S/C management plan
- Management and control of technical performance, schedule, cost and technical/schedule margins
- Documentation Control, Mission Assurance and risk mitigation



Proposer's Responses

Criterion M-1: Resources

- Factor 1: Management Approach- Strengths
 - Fully identified project team with specific roles presented-back-ups identified
 - Tight management oversight of major sub
 - PM and CTM proposed at 50%
 - Schedule and milestones sufficiently detailed
 - Provided QA, RA, Parts Engineering Plans
 - Provided compliance charts for Specimen Contract and CDRL exhibits
 - Excellent facilities
 - Detailed WBS and WBS Dictionary provided



Proposer's Responses

Criterion M-1: Resources

- Factor 1: Management Approach- Weaknesses
 - No schedule reserves; critical path not identified
 - No resume or identified allocation for Project Engineer
 - QA plan calls for a self-inspection process
 - No indication of % time allocated to key personnel
 - Control of major subcontractor undefined
 - No intention to address risk avoidance until problems arise



RFP Proposal Instructions

Section M-2: Related Experience

-Factor 1. Experience Manufacturing TWTAs

Describe your organization's related experience with TWTAs, emphasizing their use on spacecraft for interplanetary missions, if any. Show the correlation between this related experience and the MRO mission. Include in your discussion your organization's related experience in the design, analysis, fabrication, and testing of hardware similar to that proposed for this effort.



Proposer's Responses

Criterion M-2: Related Experience

- Strengths

- Did "R" TWTAs, which was a 100W X-Band program
- Prime Contractor on several X-Band contracts
- Long-established working relationship with subcontractor providing TWT
- Rich heritage of providing both TWTs and TWTAs
- TWTAs experience on a deep-space program



Proposer's Responses

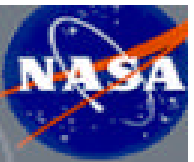
Criterion M-2: Related Experience

- Weaknesses

- No M-2 section in the proposal—information was contained in Volume 3, Past Performance



Final Evaluations- The Process



The Government Wants a Large Contingent of
Qualified SB/SDB/WOB Proposers
Follow These Tips, and Learn Others, so You
Can Be a Strong Contender for Job after Job
Opportunities Exist where You Can Win- Seek
them out!